

The 'Great Game' in Afghanistan

In the past months the small, backward and landlocked Central Asian nation of Afghanistan has become the subject of a great deal of attention in the Western press and in the highest councils of the British oligarchy and its allies in the U.S. The attention is focused on the fate of the government of President Noor Mohammed Taraki, a revolutionary regime which came to power in a army-backed revolution in April of last year and has been facing a revolt against its rule from tribal rebels who claim to carry the banner of "Islamic revolution" in the style of Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini.

However, the events in Afghanistan have been given a significance which goes far beyond that nation itself—it has become a battleground between the Soviet Union, which strongly supports the Taraki government, and the Anglo-American powers and China who have been backing the anti-Taraki efforts. Afghanistan is thus a battleground between those who proclaim that the Khomeini Dark Ages "revolution" is the "wave of the future" for the entire region and those who remain committed to a strategy of scientific and technological modernization for the developing sector nations.

It is in this context that Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter's national security advisor, proclaimed in a speech last week that the "prudent" restraint of the U.S. during the Iran revolution should be matched by the Soviet Union in its role in aiding the Taraki government in Afghanistan. Sanctimoniously this backer of Khomeini's wave of destruction declared: "We expect others similarly to abstain from intervention and from efforts to impose alien doctrines on deeply religious and nationally conscious people."

To uncover the truth about Afghanistan, the situation must be looked at on its two levels—the strategic dimension which is sometimes referred to as the Great Game, the British label for their century and half effort to battle with Russia for control of Afghanistan and the entire Central Asian region; and the dimension of the Afghan revolution itself, its origins and the present difficulties of the new government.

The Great Game today

The Anglo-American establishment has designated Afghanistan—through a constant barrage of propaganda in the press—as the Soviet Union's "Vietnam." According to this formulation the Soviet Union is backing

an increasingly unpopular regime in Kabul which is dependent on Soviet military aid and advisors to maintain its rule against an armed revolt. As this revolt gains in intensity—which the British Broadcasting Company and others have so happily reported is the case right now—the Soviets, they say, are faced with a choice of abandoning their clients, either outright or through a coup of some kind, or pouring in more support up to and including Soviet military forces—hence a "Vietnam quagmire" as the logic goes.

Leaving aside for now the important fact that the Anglo-Americans themselves have fueled this "revolt," the aim is to deliver a strategic defeat whose importance is most immediately linked to the events in Iran and the surrounding region. Soviet escalation in support of Taraki has been set up by Brzezinski and others as a trigger for a response by the U.S. in the form of U.S. intervention into the Persian Gulf region—a linkage made in the same speech referred to above. A more important stake is the fate of the Khomeini operation itself, as the Taraki government is the most open anti-Khomeini force in the world today and the religious fanatics of Iran have proclaimed the overthrow of Taraki as a major objective of their "Islamic revolution."

The success or failure then of the Afghan revolution is key to the reversal of the Khomeini destruction of Iran, and the Afghan situation has become even more vital at this time with the emergence last week in Paris of Iranian leader and former Prime Minister Bakhtiar as an opponent of Khomeini. This also intersects developments in Iraq, and in Pakistan where the Khomeini-allied military junta has been the main support for the anti-Taraki rebels who operate out of base camps in Pakistan. The supporters of murdered Pakistani Prime Minister Bhutto, whose challenge to the military regime is becoming increasingly powerful, have openly attacked the efforts to involve Pakistan as a surrogate in a war against Afghanistan and expressed support for the Taraki government.

It is this strategic dynamic that propels outcries, like the one in a recent *New York Times* op-ed, that the importance of Afghanistan is to stop a "Soviet drive to the sea"—i.e., a supposed Soviet effort to dismember Pakistan, take over Iran, all to gain access to a much vaunted "warm-water port." Such rhetoric comes

straight out of the British geopolitics which caused three "Anglo-Afghan Wars" in the 19th and 20th centuries as Britain, protecting its Indian Empire from the "Russian hordes" (this is all before the Soviet revolution), used Afghanistan as a "buffer." Now we are told, with almost no change in wording, that London-run Islamic reaction is the "buffer" needed in the region.

The present situation in Afghanistan is a virtually precise replay of the British engineered overthrow of the Afghan King Amanullah in 1929, an Afghan leader who attempted to introduce modern reforms to his backward land and to free it from British control, with the support in part of the young Soviet republic. At that time too an "Islamic revolt" was paid for by the British Secret Intelligence Services, run out of British India (from the same locations now used in Pakistan).

What really happened in Afghanistan

The British authorship of the events in the 1920s is well known to Afghans—equally well-known is the continued British role in the creation of the Islamic revolt today. The Taraki government has sharply identified the British as Afghanistan's enemy (see below).

The present Afghan leadership—at the head of which stand Taraki and Prime Minister Hafizollah Amin—came to power in a military revolution in April 1978. This was not, however, a military coup but a political revolution led by the Democratic Peoples Party (known as the Khalq), a left-wing socialist party organized among Afghan intellectuals in the early 1960s. The Khalq's main commitment has been to eliminate the feudal monarchy that has ruled Afghanistan for two centuries, the monarchy of the Durrani family.

The backwardness perpetuated in Afghanistan under the monarchy and its tribal supporters was extreme even for Third World countries: Almost 95 percent of the population is illiterate, and the country is dominated by tribal chiefs and religious leaders (mullahs) who are themselves big landowners and have opposed all previous efforts to bring modern education and reform to Afghanistan.

The April revolution followed a series of political upheavals. In 1973 the King, Zahir Shah, was overthrown in a military coup, and a "republic" headed by President Daud, a former Prime Minister under the King from 1953-63 and a brother-in-law of the King was declared. Daud came to power with the backing of Khalq and allied elements in the military and initially declared a series of democratic reforms. But within a few years, these proved to be illusory, with a late 1975 purge of the progressive supporters culminating in moves in 1977-78 to wipe out the Khalq and its allies. This included moves in early 1978 to align Afghanistan with President Anwar Sadat in Egypt and with Iran, and to place the country firmly behind overall Anglo-American policy in the region.

The April murder of a trade union leader, followed by large scale arrests of Khalq and other intellectual leaders, was the immediate spark for the April 28 revolt. The revolt was over in less than a day—after some sharp fighting, victory was proclaimed over the monarchy.

The immediate policies of the Taraki government were the rapid implementation of land reform measures, including distribution of the monarchy's land holdings, the creation of a mass literacy program which now involves some 7 million Afghans (out of a population of some 18 million), the elimination of peasant debt and usury, and the establishment of equal rights for women, including ending feudal practices of selling women. These measures brought about immediate and strong resistance from the feudal landowners and from mullahs who declared that these acts were against Islam.

The resistance from these layers, including from tribal elders who have traditionally resisted the actual rule of a central government in Afghanistan over their territories, was the raw material which was gathered by Anglo-American intelligence services to try to reverse the revolution. The base of the armed operations against the government is some 100,000 Afghan refugees encamped in Pakistan in the areas of the Northwest Frontier province (around the famous Khyber Pass). The population of this region of Pakistan is made up of the same tribes, all Pathans, who live across the border in Afghanistan. These tribes, who are heavily engaged in the growing of opium poppies and the drug trade into Iran, are now part of the armed strength of the anti-Taraki forces.

Through well circulated stories in the Western press, these feudal elements have been draped with the banner of an "Islamic revolt" against "godless communism." Several self-appointed would-be Khomeinis have emerged, squabbling among themselves as to who is the real Ayatollah. It is known that arms have gone into the rebels, that training is provided by Pakistani officers (mainly of the Khyber Rifles, a British-created force of tribal militia with regular Pakistani army officers), and that support has come from the Chinese as well, with direction mainly in the hands of agents of the British Secret Intelligence Service and the U.S. CIA. The British connection is so well known to the Afghans because of the direct role of the Muslim Brotherhood in these operations, with the main Brotherhood-connected Afghan exile leader, Mujadidi, having the distinction of being the son of the mullah who was paid by the British in the 1920s to lead the then "Islamic revolt" against that anti-feudal government.

These elements have managed so far to disrupt law and order inside Afghanistan, with armed revolts by tribal elements scattered around the country and managing in several incidents to cause significant damage in provincial cities. While the ultimate control of the Taraki government has not been threatened up to this

point, it is clear that the operations have been able to disrupt implementation of an effective land reform program and other measures and have set back the efforts of the new government. The stability needed to gradually shift the social structure of a backward nation like Afghanistan has not been given to the Taraki government. As Taraki pointed out in a recent speech: "Feudal relations do persist. . . . For example, instead of beasts of burden and traditional plows, we should press into service tractors and modern machinery."

These are the terms of the Great Game in Afghanistan at this moment. This issue of Afghanistan's relations with the Soviet Union is a fraud; it is useful to point out that even under the previous governments of the monarchy more than half of the economy was financed and developed by the Soviet Union, which shares a long border with Afghanistan—the two nations' economies are naturally integrated.

—Daniel Snieder

Prime Minister Amin lashes out at U.K., Iran

The following is from a speech delivered by Hafizollah Amin, secretary and member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan and Afghanistan's Prime Minister, to the ulemas, elders and representatives of the various tribes of Bajawor. It appeared in English in the Kabul Times on July 2, 1979.

My most dear friends: Now your brothers and your sons have the honor to follow the lead of your fathers and forefathers. Your fathers and forefathers protected the country against the British and forced the British to flee. They wiped out the agents and laborers of the British from the country and transferred the power to the toilers. When the British brought their agent to Afghanistan they established him here and said that so far infidelity was here but now Islam came because here came the British agent. Now you see that then British knew Islam, and that is why their agent came into power in Afghanistan. If the agents of the British have power and discretion in Afghanistan, then they say that Islam is very well in Afghanistan. But if liberators, lovers of land, and the servants of the people hold power for their people and for their toilers, they say that Islam is in danger because the British disappeared. They tell us we are against Shiites. Therefore, the spongers and parasites of Iran, fanatic elders or lords of Iran raise their voice that for God's sake they killed

Shiites in Afghanistan and have beaten up Shiites in Afghanistan. We say that as all the people of Afghanistan stood up against the British and shattered the British Empire and eliminated the representatives of British and drove away the British agents who had come here from one direction and raised false voices here now the valorous people of Afghanistan also stand against these British agents who now come from Iran. Here in Afghanistan whoever may be whether Shiite or Sunni, whether Hanably, Maliki, Shafiee or Hanafi, whoever live in Afghanistan, whether Hindu or Moslem, give hand together patriotically and stand against foreigners and safeguard the workers' regime, protect their country and preserve the honors and zeal of their fathers and forefathers.

The British kill Moslems every day through Israelis in the holy land which is from the historical point of view the first Qebla (altar) and from the sanctity point of view the second Qebla of Moslems. They shed the blood of the sons and women of Moslems, eliminate the aged and force them to escape from their homes and replace them by infidel Israelis. Now they shout for the Moslems of Afghanistan. Is there any greater lie, hypocrisy and greater disgrace than this? They do this in order to bring back their representatives to Afghanistan, bring again their laborers and servants, to bring back Khanism and kingdom again in Afghanistan, and bring back those who would dance at the tune of their drum and greet them. Now the toiling Moslems have the power in their hands and the toiling people have the regime in their hand. Now the toiling people rule and this has broken the heart of the English. The agents of the British come and the agents of the British have no sleep.

Now again we see that our enemies who have fled from Afghanistan have also gathered in London and meet in London and talk openly to their friends in London and are in contact with them and say that they should topple down the Khalqi regime of Afghanistan and that what should be done about the Khalqi regime of Afghanistan. We do not accept, made-in-London Moslems. We accept those Moslems who have been born in our country, grown in our country and are living in our country and consider themselves our brothers and make efforts together with us to build the country and have the political power of the country in their hands along with us.

We take pride in our country where there is a war between the toilers and spongers. There is no war of infidelity and Islam here. Here, nobody can get rich on the labour of others. From now on there is no concept of richness and property in Afghanistan. There will not be such mentality.